

The President's Daily Brief

31 December 1970



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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

31 December 1970

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Foreign Minister Thanat is continuing to promote the idea of closer Thai relations with Communist countries. (Page 3)

Indonesia is planning informal talks on defense cooperation with several Far Eastern governments. (Page 4)

At Annex, we discuss some of the threats faced by the new government of President Torres in Bolivia.

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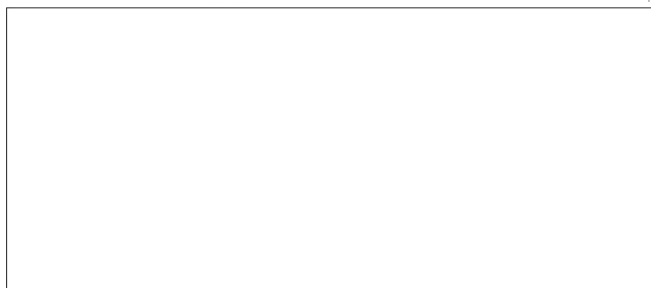
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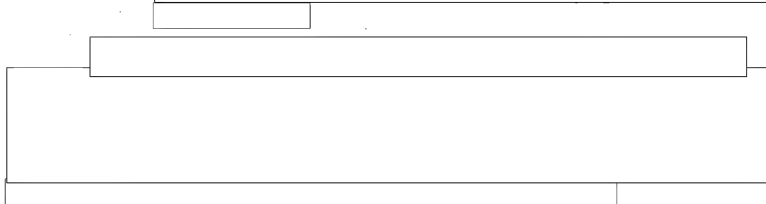
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THAILAND

Foreign Minister Thanat used the occasion of the recent signing of the Thai-Soviet trade agreement to play up Bangkok's interest in an accommodation with Moscow. He also took advantage of several year-end foreign policy reviews with the Bangkok press corps to reaffirm his desire for better relations with Communist China and North Vietnam. For the first time he publicly characterized North Vietnam's dispatch of a delegation to Thailand to discuss refugee repatriation as a favorable development in Hanoi's foreign policy, and Bangkok's acceptance of the delegation as a "sign of our goodwill."

Thanat's statements about improving relations with the Communists have been accompanied by expressions of concern over the steadfastness of the US commitment to Thailand. He told the press, for example, that there had been some deterioration in US-Thai relations over the past year, and implied that the fault lay in Washington.

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Some of Thanat's public statements are probably calculated to give Bangkok additional leverage with the US. He recognizes that Thailand remains dependent on the US for its security as long as it faces a credible Communist threat and is incapable of defending its territory with its own resources. In addition, it is questionable that there is much support from the military leadership for Thanat's idea of important changes in the country's foreign policy.

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INDONESIA

General Sumitro, Indonesia's top internal security officer who has also undertaken diplomatic tasks for President Suharto, expects to begin a month-long tour on 2 January to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Australia, and Japan. Sumitro wants to discuss Indonesia's "strategic thinking" on the "potential threat to Southeast Asia" and to explore defense and security cooperation "of a nonpact character."

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seminars on common Asian problems.

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Indonesia has devised a ten-year strategic plan to meet Chinese Communist subversion in Southeast Asia. The plan includes regional cooperation and Indonesian assistance--mainly advice and training--to individual governments. The Sumitro talks are a step in this direction.

Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines are members with Indonesia in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

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Australia and Japan are included in Sumitro's tour presumably because Indonesia considers them potential sources of economic assistance and diplomatic support.

Indonesia continues to insist that it is not interested in a regional defense pact and is carefully avoiding any such implication in the upcoming talks. Djakarta is highly interested in area security, however, and is ambitious for an active area role as well. For example, last May it sponsored a regional conference to look into a solution of the Cambodian problem.

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BOLIVIA

President Torres seized power last October with the backing, though not the full support, of several disparate groups. This support in some instances was conditioned on the acceptance of various demands that have since been sidestepped for the most part by Torres. As a result these special interest groups have become restless and are increasingly resorting to force to achieve their objectives. In the coming months Torres will face a major threat to the existence of his government, and Bolivia could be thrown into anarchy and bloodshed.

Torres' takeover was possible because the military group which overthrew President Ovando could not consolidate its power. The basic institutional unity of the military was damaged in those tumultuous days and they have not regrouped behind Torres.

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Bolivian leftists are dissatisfied with Torres because he has not acted on any of his vaguely stated "revolutionary" programs, especially the progressive nationalization of foreign companies. The backing of leftist student and labor leaders was another critical element that allowed Torres to declare himself President. In return these groups expected some prestigious portfolios in the government, the scheduling of free elections, wage increases, and other concessions. These concessions have not materialized, however, and the attitudes of labor and students now range from wary suspicion to outright opposition.

Businessmen, too, are dissatisfied that the government has not enunciated any clear statement of its economic policies. They complain that it has been spineless in the face of leftist seizures of the largest cattle ranch in the country, the leading La Paz newspaper, and other private property. Even the limited support Torres had from the peasantry has dissolved and most of the campesinos have reverted to their normal apathy.

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For maintaining power in the short run Torres must depend on the disorganization of his opposition. At present, no opposition group has the strength, organization and determination to replace him with a strong regime. [REDACTED]

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